Increasing ‘mindfulness’ through meditation

An increasing number of lawyers are looking to lower their stress levels with daily meditation and monthly “mindfulness” meetings.

According to Stephanie West Allen, a founder of the Colorado Contemplative Lawyers Society, meditation is catching on among lawyers who want to reduce stress and strengthen their focus amid the economic chaos.

“This notion of mindfulness seems to be really growing,” says Allen, author of idealawg (http://westallen.typepad.com/idealawg).

The Mindful Awareness Research Center at the University of California at Los Angeles describes “mindful awareness” as a practice that comes from a variety of contemplative traditions. It can be experienced through meditation, yoga, art or time spent in nature.

The first meeting of the Colorado Contemplative Lawyers Society took place in Denver in April and attracted about 10 attorneys, including solo and small-firm lawyers, attorneys from large firms and lawyers at the state Attorney General’s office. The number of attendees is expected to double as the group continues meeting monthly for meditation sessions.

Similar groups meet in New York, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco.

The meeting in Denver was held in the boardroom of Holme, Roberts & Owen, a large firm, and the meditation was led by one of the partners.

“It shows that [meditation] is being accepted by mainstream, big law,” says Allen.

“There’s been a steady growth in interest,” she adds. “And I think it may be escalating because of the stress lawyers are feeling.

But meditation isn’t just for stress-reduction, according to Allen.

“It’s equally for professional development, because it allows people to focus and be calm and really know what their options are,” she explains. “Instead of getting led around by their reactive brain, it really allows the reflective mind to be in control.

“Often, when lawyers hear about meditation and mindfulness, they don’t want to do it because they think, ‘It’s going to make me not a warrior,’ but in fact, it focuses that fire; it doesn’t put it out,” Allen says.

You can find sample meditations from UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center at: http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22

6 tips for reducing stress

Meditation is one way to reduce stress, but there are other easy ways lawyers can lower their stress levels.

Stephanie West Allen, a lawyer coach and author of idealawg and Brains on Purpose, offers these tips:

• Get adequate sleep.
  “That’s really very critical for the brain, for thinking and for your cognitive processes,” Allen says.

• Exercise.
  “It’s good for your body, but also for your brain. When you exercise, you grow neurons,” Allen notes.

• Have fun.
  “Laughter and smiling is very good for people.”

• Be careful what you eat.

• Drink lots of water.

• Yawn.
  “Yawning actually helps you to be sharper,” Allen says. “It’s a mechanism for alertness.”

— NORA LOCKWOOD TOOHER